



Air and Radiation

<http://www.epa.gov/air/noise.html>
Last updated on Tuesday, July 19, 2011

You are here: [EPA Home](#) [Air and Radiation](#) Noise Pollution

Noise Pollution

Announcements

On this page:

- [What is Noise Pollution?](#)
- [Health Effects](#)
- [Protection from Noise](#)
- [The Role of EPA](#)
- [Noise Sources Regulated by EPA](#)
- [Current Activities](#)
- [Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- [Resource Center](#)

August 5, 2009 - Revised Regulation for the Labeling of Hearing Protection Devices (HPD) Proposed
[See Current Activities](#)

You will need Adobe Acrobat Reader to view the Adobe PDF files on this page.
See [EPA's PDF page](#) for more information about getting and using the free Acrobat Reader.

What is Noise Pollution?

The traditional definition of noise is "unwanted or disturbing sound". Sound becomes unwanted when it either interferes with normal activities such as sleeping, conversation, or disrupts or diminishes one's quality of life. The fact that you can't see, taste or smell it may help explain why it has not received as much attention as other types of pollution, such as air pollution, or water pollution. The air around us is constantly filled with sounds, yet most of us would probably not say we are surrounded by noise. Though for some, the persistent and escalating sources of sound can often be considered an annoyance. This "annoyance" can have major consequences, primarily to one's overall health.

Health Effects

Noise pollution adversely affects the lives of millions of people. Studies have shown that there are direct links between noise and health. Problems related to noise include stress related illnesses, high blood pressure, speech interference, hearing loss, sleep disruption, and lost productivity. Noise Induced Hearing Loss (NIHL) is the most common and often discussed health effect, but research has shown that exposure to constant or high levels of noise can cause countless adverse health affects.

Learn more about the health effects:

<http://www.nonoise.org/library/handbook/handbook.htm> [EXIT Disclaimer](#)

<http://www.nonoise.org/library/suter/suter.htm> [EXIT Disclaimer](#)

Protection from Noise

Individuals can take many steps to protect themselves from the harmful effects of noise

pollution. If people must be around loud sounds, they can protect their ears with hearing protection (e.g., ear plugs or ear muffs). There are various strategies for combating noise in your home, school, workplace, and the community.

Learn more about noise pollution prevention:

<http://www.nonoise.org> [EXIT Disclaimer](#)

The Role of EPA

Under the Clean Air Act, the EPA administrator established the Office of Noise Abatement and Control (ONAC) to carry out investigations and studies on noise and its effect on the public health and welfare. Through ONAC, the EPA coordinated all Federal noise control activities, but in 1981 the Administration concluded that noise issues were best handled at the State and local level. As a result, ONAC was closed and primary responsibility of addressing noise issues was transferred to State and local governments. However, EPA retains authority to investigate and study noise and its effect, disseminate information to the public regarding noise pollution and its adverse health effects, respond to inquiries on matters related to noise, and evaluate the effectiveness of existing regulations for protecting the public health and welfare, pursuant to the Noise Control Act of 1972 and the Quiet Communities Act of 1978.

Learn more about the Clean Air Act, Noise Control Act of 1972, and the Quiet Communities Act of 1978:

[Clean Air Act \(Title IV – Noise Pollution\)](#)

[The Noise Control Act of 1972 \(42USC7641\)\(PDF\) \(21pp, 890k\)](#)

[The Quiet Communities Act of 1978](#)

Noise Sources Regulated by EPA

EPA or a designated Federal agency regulates noise sources, such as rail and motor carriers, low noise emission products, construction equipment, transport equipment, trucks, motorcycles, and the labeling of hearing protection devices. For additional information, see <http://publicaccess.supportportal.com/ics/support/default.asp?deptID=23012&task=knowledge&questionID=15642> or contact the following:

Catrice Jefferson
Mailing Address:
U.S. EPA Headquarters
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Ariel Rios Building - Mail Code 6103A
Washington, DC 20460
E-mail: jefferson.catrice@epa.gov

Current Activities

EPA is currently revising its regulation for the Labeling of Hearing Protection Devices (HPD) (i.e., ear plugs, ear muffs, communication headsets, etc.), [40CFR, Part 211 Subpart B](#) that are sold wholly or in part on the basis of their effectiveness to reduce unwanted sound (noise) as well as those products that emit noise that may adversely affect the public health and welfare.

EPA has been working with the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) to revise the regulation on the basis of addressing the following:

- New technology devices that have evolved since the 1979 promulgation of the labeling regulation.
- Regulatory testing of effectiveness that is based on an outdated ANSI standard.
- Required testing and effectiveness rating methods that are not suitable for many new technology devices.
- Many new technology devices are precluded from sale as "hearing protectors" by required test method and rating scheme.

Learn more about these activities:

- [Press Release Announcing the Establishment of a New Noise Labeling Program \(1979\)](#)
- [EPA Workshop on Hearing Protection Devices \(2003\) \(PDF\) \(212pp, 5.1 MB\)](#)
[\[EXIT Disclaimer\]](#)
- [EPA Docket \(#OAR-2003-0024\)](#)
- [EPA Noise Library](#) [\[EXIT Disclaimer\]](#)
- [Fact Sheet - Proposed Revisions to the Product Noise Labeling Regulation for Hearing Protection Devices \(PDF\) \(3pp, 22k\) - August 5, 2009](#)
- [Federal Register Notice - Proposed Revisions to the Product Noise Labeling Regulation for Hearing Protection Devices - August 5, 2009](#)

Frequently Asked Questions

EPA is usually the first line of contact when there are questions regarding noise pollution. However, the roles have shifted and State and local governments have acquired the responsibility of responding to many noise pollution matters.

For State Environmental Agencies, see <http://www.epa.gov/epahome/state.htm>

Some of the commonly asked questions from the public relate to noises in the community (from your neighbor, boom cars, lawn equipment, etc.) and from commercial businesses (factory, auto mechanic shop, etc.), aviation, railroad/locomotive horn noise, and interstate motor carrier.

For answers, see
<http://publicaccess.supportportal.com/ics/support/default.asp?deptID=23012&task=knowledge&questionID=15642>

Resource Center

To learn more about noise and the adverse health effects of noise exposure, tools for children and teachers, conferences and workshops, and much more, please visit the following organizations.

- [Noise Pollution Clearinghouse](#) [\[EXIT Disclaimer\]](#)
- [Noise Off](#) [\[EXIT Disclaimer\]](#)
- [American Speech-Language-Hearing Association](#) [\[EXIT Disclaimer\]](#)
- [League for the Hard of Hearing](#) [\[EXIT Disclaimer\]](#)
- [National Hearing Conservation Association](#) [\[EXIT Disclaimer\]](#)
- [Council for Accreditation in Occupation Hearing Conservation](#) [\[EXIT Disclaimer\]](#)
- [American Academy of Audiology](#) [\[EXIT Disclaimer\]](#)
- [NIOSH Compendium](#) [\[EXIT Disclaimer\]](#)

For Kids and Teachers

- [Listen UP! Play It Safe With Your Ears. Play It Safe With Your Health. For Elementary](#)

School Students(PDF) (15pp, 6.5 MB)- For a hard copy, please contact jefferson.catrice@epa.gov

- Say What? Play It Safe With Your Ears. Play It Safe With Your Health. For Middle School Students(PDF) (16pp, 2.4 MB)- For a hard copy, please contact jefferson.catrice@epa.gov
- Noise and Its Effects on Children. Information for parents, teachers, and childcare providers(PDF) (2pp, 2 MB) - For a hard copy, please contact jefferson.catrice@epa.gov
- Noise Coloring Book (PDF) (10pp, 2.2 MB) [EXIT Disclaimer](#)
- Dangerous Decibels [EXIT Disclaimer](#)
- American Speech-Language Hearing Association Ear Bud Campaign [EXIT Disclaimer](#)
- National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders [EXIT Disclaimer](#)
- National Hearing Conservation Association [EXIT Disclaimer](#)